

**American Coalition for Filipino Veterans, Inc.**  
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*February 15, 2007*

## **TESTIMONY OF FRANCO ARCEBAL**

### **A Filipino American WWII Veteran**

Honorable Chairman & Members of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs,

Good morning. My name is Franco Arcebal, a Filipino World War II veteran, and the vice-president for membership of the American Coalition for Filipino Veterans, Inc. Our nonprofit non-partisan advocacy organization has more than **4,000 individual members** in the United States. I am now 83-years-old and a retired sales executive. I reside in Los Angeles.

Our president, Mr. Patrick Ganio, Sr., a Bataan and Corregidor defender in 1942 and a Purple Heart medal recipient, could not join us this morning because of his health situation. He lives in Jacksonville Florida. His statement is included in our written testimony.

Thank you for holding this early hearing on the **Equity bill H.R. 760** for Filipino World War II veterans. Never in the history of our long quest for full recognition benefits has a hearing been scheduled within two weeks after its introduction.

We owe this to the Honorable Bob FILNER, our undaunted and tireless champion in the House of Representatives. He and I were **arrested** along with 12 of my comrades for civil disobedience when we chained ourselves in front of the White House in July 1997. Sadly, we were unable to convince the Clinton Administration to support our Equity bill.

I am honored and pleased to present the plea of my comrades. But allow me a brief introduction.

During World War II, I was a guerrilla intelligence officer in Northern Luzon. I was caught and severely **tortured** by Japanese soldiers as a spy. I was sentenced for decapitation. Luckily for me, during a rainstorm at night, I was able to escape. I dug out a tunnel under the wall of our "monkey house".

In 1987, I became a new U.S. permanent resident. Because of my age, I had very little income. Because I had a painful dental problem, I sought treatment at the Los Angeles VA clinic.

I was terribly shocked when I was told that my services in WWII in the U.S. Army Forces, was by law deemed NOT "active service for the purposes of any benefit administered by the U.S. VA."

I concluded that the United States whom I served loyally and risked my life, did me an injustice. I felt terribly discriminated upon.

This incident was a result of the Rescission Act enacted on February 18, 1946 (now U.S. Code Title 38, Sec. 107) over the objections of President Harry Truman. Before this law Filipino veterans had U.S. veterans status with the VA.

Today, I expect many persuasive testimonies to justify the passage of H.R. 760. I join them because of my duty to speak on behalf of my comrade veterans who elderly, disabled and poor.

Our Coalition leaders view the **EQUITY bill in five parts**. They are:

- 1) **U.S. recognition of our WWII service,**
- 2) **VA burial benefits,**
- 3) **war injury compensation,**
- 4) **VA health care and**
- 5) **NON-service connected disability pension.**

Over the past decade, our coalition's mission is to restore FULL U.S. Government recognition and to **win equitable U.S. V.A. benefits** for our veterans. We believe that by passing the "Filipino Veterans Equity Act," or the realistic bills of our sponsors, we can finally overcome the discriminatory effects of the "Rescission Act;"

### **Why should Filipino veterans be officially recognized for VA benefits?**

FIRST, on July 26, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered soldiers of the Philippine Commonwealth Army who were then U.S. nationals into military service.

SECOND, before the Rescission Act of February 18, 1946, the VA considered us as American veterans with "active service" status.

THIRD, 24,000 Filipino WWII veterans were naturalized based on their U.S. military service under Section 405 of the Immigration and naturalization Act of 1990.

FOURTH, under Public Law PL 106-419, if they died, they are eligible for burial benefits with military honors in national cemeteries as U.S. veterans.

FIFTH, under PL 108-170, Filipino American veterans can now be admitted as patients in VA hospitals, clinics and nursing homes, however they are not eligible for non-war related disability pensions that American counterparts receive.

We deeply appreciate the steadfast leadership of Sen. Daniel Inouye, Sen. Daniel Akaka, Sen. Arlen Specter, former Rep. Benjamin Gilman, Rep. Bob Filner, Rep. Chris Smith, Rep. Juanita Millender-McDonald, Rep. Darrell Issa, Rep. Rob Simmons, Rep. Nancy Johnson and others.

With our step-by-step strategy, your Committee and the Senate have passed Filipino veteran bills worth **\$38 Million in yearly benefits**:

We have supported several bills and budget proposals to win the last step of **VA non-service connected pension** that would provide a dignified income to our veterans to bring them above poverty in the Philippines and in U.S. and fully recognize their U.S. military service. These proposals were:

- 1) \$100 monthly pension 2001 proposal of Sen. Daniel INOUE's bill S. 68 and Rep. Juanita Millender-McDonald's "Fairness bill." Philippine President Gloria Arroyo had officially requested this pension from President Bush;
- 2) **\$200 monthly** proposal of Rep. Lane Evans \$22M budget request in 2005 for vets in the Philippines and in U.S. (Rep. Nancy Pelosi endorsed); and,
- 3) \$100 VA medical care monthly allowance for Filipino vets in the Philippines that our coalition had proposed to VA Secretary Anthony Principi in 2004.

#### **OUR REQUESTS TO THE VA COMMITTEE:**

FIRST: Pass or mark up the final **authorizing language** of the EQUITY BILL with strong bipartisan support of the Committee.

SECOND: Seek an estimated **budget item of \$18 to \$22 Million** from the Bush Administration, VA Secretary Jim Nicholson and the Appropriation Committees to provide an equitable monthly pension of at least \$200 for us low-income Filipino WWII veterans.

THIRD: Form a **task force** of representatives of the HVAC, the VA Secretary, the Philippine Ambassador and the key veteran organizations to determine within 45 days the current Filipino veteran populations, assess their economic and health needs and to provide a realistic budget request.

We yearn and pray this **reasonable package of benefits be authorized and granted** within the context of H.R. 760. We trust our requests be favorably considered.

Let me close by quoting President Truman on February 20, 1946 when he objected to the "Rescission Act, "

"The Philippine Army veterans are nationals of the United States and will continue in that status until July 4, 1946. They fought under the American flag and under the direction of our military leaders. They fought with gallantry under the most difficult conditions... They were commissioned by us. Their official organization the army of the Philippine Commonwealth was taken into the Armed Forces of the United States on July 26, 1941. That order has never been revoked nor amended. **I consider it a moral obligation of the United States to look after the welfare of the Filipino veterans.**"

THANK YOU,

**Mr. FRANCO ARCEBAL**, Vice-president for Membership  
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